

# Information on Hepatitis A Infection



## What is hepatitis A?

- An infection of the liver caused by a virus. Hepatitis A can range from a mild illness lasting one to two weeks to a serious illness that can cause hospitalization. Some people may not get sick at all.
- Early symptoms can include tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and aching.
- Later symptoms can include dark-colored urine, light-colored stool and jaundice (when the eyes or skin turn yellow).

## What should someone who has symptoms of hepatitis A do?

**See a doctor!**

## How is hepatitis A spread?

- Hepatitis A viruses are in the intestines of a person who is infected. The viruses leave the body in a person's feces. If the infected person doesn't wash his/her hands after a bowel movement, her/his hands may be contaminated with viruses.
- When that person handles food, the food is contaminated with hepatitis A viruses. Whoever eats the food can then become infected.
- Hepatitis A can be spread by unprotected oral/anal sexual contact.
- It is easily spread when a person doesn't wash his/her hands after changing an infected child's dirty diapers.

## Who is susceptible?

Anybody, any age, can get hepatitis A. After being infected a person is almost always protected for life.

## How long after being infected does a person first become sick?

Fifteen to 50 days; usually 28 to 30 days.

## When can someone with hepatitis A spread it to others?

One to two weeks before the first symptoms appear through one week after jaundice appears (or two weeks after first symptoms occurred).

## How can the spread of hepatitis A be prevented?

- **Thoroughly wash hands.** Use soap and warm water after using the toilet or diapering children.
- **Always wash hands.** Before preparing, serving or handling food. If you have hepatitis A do not prepare, serve or share food with others until one week after jaundice began (or two weeks after symptoms first began).
- **Use a barrier during oral/anal sexual contact.**
- **Work restrictions.** Food handlers, childcare workers, health care workers and residential care workers who provide personal care should not work until they are no longer contagious. Food handlers, childcare workers and health care workers who live in a household in which there is a case of hepatitis A should not work unless exempted by the health department.
- **Childcare restrictions.** Children with hepatitis A should not attend childcare until they are no longer contagious.
- **Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended.** Children 2 years of age and older should be immunized against hepatitis A. The hepatitis A vaccine is given **before exposure**. The vaccine **is not used after** a person has been exposed to hepatitis A.

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### What should someone do if they've been in close contact with a person with hepatitis A?

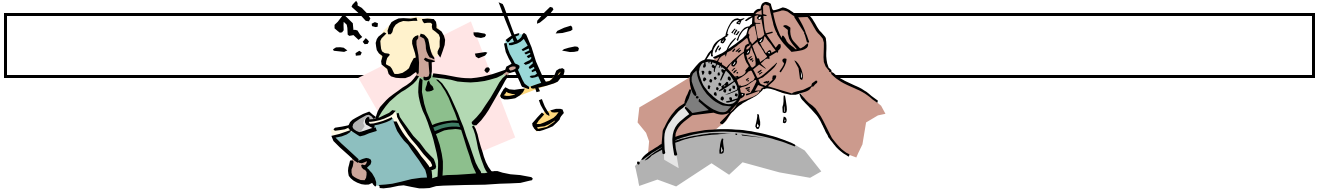
- **Household members, sex partners and contacts in childcare settings** should receive immune globulin (IG) as soon as possible, **but no longer than 14 days after** their most recent exposure. Only someone who has eaten ready-to-eat food handled by someone with hepatitis A is at risk of being infected. IG is not recommended for the usual office, school or work situations.
- **Practice good hand washing!**

### What is the treatment for hepatitis A?

There is no specific treatment. Treatment of symptoms and rehydration (fluid replacement) may be necessary.

If you have any questions, please call your doctor or local health department.

### Vaccination *and* good hand washing are the best ways to prevent hepatitis A!



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### Central District Health Department Offices

Communicable Disease  
707 N. Armstrong Place  
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327-8625

Immunizations-Boise  
707 N. Armstrong Place  
Boise, ID 83704  
327-7450

Valley County Office  
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